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Chapter 7.

THE KORANIC ROOTS OF *IHSAN*



Having looked at *islam* and *iman*, the first two dimensions of Islam as delineated in the hadith of Gabriel, it is now time to turn to the third and deepest dimension, *ihsan*, or "doing what is beautiful." We suggested that discussions of *islam* focus on activity, while those on *iman* look closely at understanding. As for discussions of *ihsan*, they focus on human intentionality. Why do people do what they do? *Islam* tells us what they should do and *iman* provides them with an understanding of why it is necessary to do what they do, but neither of these domains concerns itself with how it is possible to bring one's motivations and psychological qualities into harmony with one's activity and understanding. This is the concern of those who focus on *ihsan* and related concepts as the ideal qualities of the human soul. We now turn to a discussion of a few of the Koranic ideals that are connected with correct motivations, and some of the ways in which Islamic institutional forms reflect these concerns.



The Word *Ihsan*

In the hadith of Gabriel, the Prophet said that *ihsan* is "to worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He sees you." Before

investigating the meaning and implications of this saying, it will be useful to look at how the word *ihsan* is used in the Koran and the Hadith.

Ihsan derives from the word *husn*, which designates the quality of being good and beautiful. Dictionaries tell us that *husn* means, in general, every positive quality (goodness, goodliness, beauty, comeliness, pleasingness, harmony, symmetry, desirability). Its opposites are *qubh* (repulsiveness) and *su'* (ugliness or evil).

The dictionaries do not consider *husn* a synonym of *khayr* (which we discussed earlier in opposition to *sharr*: "good and evil"). *Husn* is a good that is inseparable from beauty and attractiveness, while *khayr* is a good that provides a concrete benefit, but it may not be beautiful and attractive; or it may simply be "better" than its alternative. We saw that *khayr* is often used as a comparative adjective.

Husn needs to be distinguished from *jamal*, which we also translate as "beauty." We have encountered the term *jamal* in the hadith, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty." Sometimes *jamal* is practically synonymous with *husn*. Some lexicographers say that in the case of human beauty, *husn* refers to the eyes, while *jamal* refers to the nose. In religious terminology, *jamal* has no opposite. Instead, it is employed as the correlative of *jalal*, or "majesty." Thus we have the beautiful and the majestic names of God.

The Koran employs the word *hasana*, from the same root as *husn*, to mean a good or beautiful deed or thing. Its opposite is *sayyi'a*, an ugly deed or thing. A *hasana* may be done by both human beings and God, but a *sayyi'a* cannot be performed by God:

Whatever beautiful thing touches you, it is from God, and whatever ugly thing touches you, it is from yourself. (4:79)

He who brings something beautiful shall have better than it, but he who brings something ugly—those who worked ugly things shall be recompensed only with what they were working. (28:84)

Perhaps the most significant Koranic usage of words derived from *husn* is found in the adjective *husna*, "most beautiful," which is applied to God's names. We have noted that the Koran mentions God's "most beautiful names" in four verses. This means that God's attributes are more beautiful, more attractive, and more praiseworthy than the attributes of anything else. In effect, the adjective *husna* expresses the first Shahadah, because it means that each of the most beautiful names designates a superlative quality. Or rather, each divine name designates an attribute possessed by God alone. God is beautiful, and none is beautiful but God. God is majestic, and none is majestic but God. All the most beautiful names can be placed in the formula of *tawhid*.

The Koran also uses the word *husna* as a noun, meaning "the best, the most beautiful," that which comprises all goodness, beauty, and desir-

ability. *Husna* is the recompense given to those who have faith. By following the prophets and living up to the Trust, human beings actualize God's most beautiful names in themselves and come to participate in everything that is most beautiful. Hence the word *husna* is used to designate both the attributes of God and the ultimate goal of human beings, the felicity that they experience in the next world.

As for him who has faith and does wholesome works, his recompense shall be the most beautiful. (18:88)

For those who answer their Lord, the most beautiful, and for those who answer Him not, . . . theirs shall be an ugly reckoning, and their refuge shall be Gehenna. (13:18)

The word *ihsan* is a verb that means to do or to establish what is good and beautiful. In the Koranic verses that follow, we will translate it as "to do what is beautiful" or "to make beautiful." The Koran employs the word and its active particle *muhsin* (the one who does what is beautiful) in seventy verses. Significantly, it often designates God as the one who does what is beautiful, and *al-muhsin* is one of the divine names. God's doing the beautiful began with creation itself, while the crowning glory of creation is the human being, made in God's most beautiful form:

He is the Knower of the unseen and the visible, the Mighty, the Compassionate, who made beautiful everything that He created. And He created the human being from clay, and made his progeny an extraction of mean water. Then He proportioned him and blew into him of His own spirit. (32:6-9)

It is God who made the earth a fixed place for you, and heaven a building, and He formed you, made your forms beautiful, and provided you with the pleasant things. (40:64)

He created the heavens and the earth with the Real, formed you, and made your forms beautiful, and to Him is the homecoming. (64:3)

If God does what is beautiful through creating human beings, human beings have the obligation to do what is beautiful in their relationships with God and other creatures. In other words, they should act in accordance with their *fitra*, the original disposition that God placed within them: "Do what is beautiful, as God has done what is beautiful to you" (28:77).

When people do what is beautiful, this of course does not benefit God. People themselves gain by conforming to their own deepest nature: "If you do what is beautiful, you do what is beautiful to your own souls,

and if you do what is ugly, it is to them likewise" (17:7). But of course, people will not be able to do what is beautiful until God helps them to do so. In the last analysis, human activity depends upon God's initiative. God made all things beautiful, just as he made all things *muslims*. But only his guidance allows people to become Muslims, and so also, only his blessing and mercy can turn a person's ugly character traits into beautiful character traits. This helps explain the sense of the supplication taught by the Prophet: "O God, Thou hast made my creation [*khalq*] beautiful, so make my character [*khuluq*] beautiful too."

The Koran repeatedly commands human beings to do what is beautiful, and at the same time, it promises that those who do what is beautiful will be brought under the sway of God's gentle, merciful, and beautiful names. The following two verses are especially significant in that they connect *ihsan* with *husna*. We are reminded that the ugly is recompensed only with its like, but the good and the beautiful are recompensed not only with their like, but with increase as well. Human qualities gain their reality from the most beautiful divine qualities. When human beings return to God, their beautiful qualities become indistinguishable from God's own qualities.

To God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, so that He may recompense those who do the ugly for what they have done, and recompense those who do what is beautiful with the most beautiful. (53:31)

Those who do what is beautiful will receive the most beautiful and increase. (10:26)

A hadith brings out the beautiful's power to efface the ugly with special clarity:

When the servant submits, and his submission is beautiful, God will acquit him of every ugly thing he approached. After that, the requital for the beautiful will be the like of it ten to seven hundred times over, and for the ugly its like, unless God should disregard it.

In the following Koranic verses, notice that the first beautiful act that human beings must perform after *tawhid* is to do what is beautiful and good to their own parents, those who brought them into existence. It is parents who provide the means that God employs in creating people, in making them beautiful. God takes credit for creation—this is the demand of *tawhid*. But he expects his creatures to act appropriately toward the human intermediaries of creation. Only then can people hope that other creatures—and their own children—will act beautifully toward them.

Worship none but God, and do what is beautiful toward parents. (2:83)

Say: "Come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you: You must not associate others with Him. And do what is beautiful toward parents. Slay not your children because of poverty; We will provide you and them. Approach not any indecency, outward or inward. . . ." (6:151)

Set not up with God another god, or you will sit condemned and forsaken. God has decreed that you shall worship none but Him. And do what is beautiful toward parents, whether one or both of them reaches old age with you. Say not to them, "Fie," neither chide them, but speak unto them respectful words, and lower to them the wing of humbleness, and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little." (17:22-24)

We have charged the human being that he do what is beautiful toward his parents. His mother bore him painfully, and painfully she gave birth to him. . . . When he is fully grown, and reaches forty years, he says, "My Lord, dispose me that I may be thankful for Thy blessing wherewith Thou hast blessed me, my father, and my mother, and that I may do wholesome works that will please Thee. And make my offspring wholesome toward me." (46:15)

The Koran always depicts those who do the beautiful as good and praiseworthy human beings. They share in God's quality of *ihsan*, and hence they are near to him and participate in his gentleness and mercy. Since they do the beautiful, they themselves are beautiful. Hence, it is not surprising that in five out of sixteen Koranic verses where God is said to love human beings, they are described as *muhsin*, while in the remaining eleven verses, they are given other good and beautiful qualities (we will come back to the significance of this point when we discuss love):

God is with those who are god-wary, and those who do what is beautiful. (16:128)

Do what is beautiful. God loves those who do what is beautiful. (2:195)

Pardon them and forgive; God loves those who do what is beautiful. (5:13)

Have patience. God will not leave to waste the wage of those who do what is beautiful. (11:115)

*active
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Those who struggle for Us—We shall guide them on Our paths, and God is with those who do what is beautiful. (29:69)

Who is more beautiful in religion than he who submits [Islam] his face to God while he does what is beautiful? (4:125)

The mercy of God is near to those who do what is beautiful. (7:56)

God rewards them . . . with gardens through which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever. That is the recompense of those who do what is beautiful. (5:85)

They shall have whatsoever they want with their Lord—that is the recompense of those who do what is beautiful. (39:34)

 The word *ihsan* is used in a wide variety of ways. Doing what is beautiful is important on every level. One place where Muslims have always paid close attention to this rule is in giving names to their children. Like people in practically every other civilization, Muslims have chosen names that represent ideals that they hope their children will achieve. A number of hadiths make explicit the importance of choosing names, and the Prophet sometimes changed people's names if he felt they were inappropriate. Typically, people who convert to Islam adopt a Muslim name as a sign of the identity they hope to achieve. The Prophet said that the most beloved names to God are 'Abd Allah (servant of God) and 'Abd al-Rahman (servant of the Merciful). He summed up the importance of names in the saying, "You will be called on the day of resurrection by your names and the names of your fathers, so make your names beautiful."

On one level, this is a command to choose beautiful names for children. On another level, of course, it is a command for people to rectify their own character traits so that they will be called by names such as generous, kind, compassionate, and so on, which are among God's most beautiful names. The long hadith we quoted toward the end of the section on the Return mentions that, after death, people will be called by the most beautiful or the most repulsive names by which they were called in this world, depending on their character traits.

One indication of the importance of *husn* in the Islamic world view is the fact that the Prophet's two grandchildren were called Hasan and Husayn. We have already met the first word, the adjective from *husn*, meaning "beautiful." *Husayn* is the diminutive of the same word. Hence, the two names can be translated as "the beautiful one" and "the little beauty." The fact that we do not think that these would be appropriate names for men says something about different conceptions of beauty in the West and in Islam. What is certain is that the two names were chosen, or at least approved, by the Prophet himself.

One of the most interesting hadiths concerning *ihsan* is the following, which is found in most of the standard hadith collections:

God has prescribed doing what is beautiful for everything. When you kill, do the killing beautifully, and when you slaughter, do the slaughtering beautifully. You should sharpen your blade so that the victim is relieved.

The first sentence is of special importance, because it sets down a universal rule. Just as God has created the cosmos as beautiful, so human activity, which must follow the divine model, has to be performed beautifully. Then, the hadith turns to the specific instance which probably occasioned the saying in the first place. The Prophet is telling his companions that they know the Koran and that it has commanded doing the beautiful. They should not think that acts that are normally considered ugly are in any way exempt. Killing is ordinarily an ugly act, and killing a human being without just cause is sufficient reason to end up in hell: "Whoso slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption done in the earth, is as if he had slain all people" (5:32; cf. 4:93). In the same way, slaughtering animals for food is not an act that most people find pleasant and attractive, and with good reason. Nevertheless, God has allowed it, and hence it should be done in the best way possible.

In the third sentence of the hadith, the Prophet gives a specific example of what doing the beautiful involves on this level, where a certain ugliness is inevitable. The knife should be sharp, so that the animal's throat can be slit quickly, and the animal will not suffer. Likewise, if it is a question of killing a human being, whether in war or as retaliation, it should be done with a sharp sword. This command is not unrelated to a large number of prohibitions found in the Shariah concerning war. For example, women, children, priests and monks, and noncombatants in general must not be harmed. (This means, of course, that the Shariah prohibits all the means of mass destruction employed in modern warfare.)

Worship

The Koran and the Prophet consider *ihsan* as one of the most desirable of human qualities. The Koran connects *ihsan* to everything good and praiseworthy and makes its possessors the inhabitants of paradise. The Prophet's definition of *ihsan* in the hadith of Gabriel is especially interesting in that it gives us an insight into the quality's interior dimension, its psychology. It explains the human attitudes and motivations that go hand in hand with *ihsan*. We begin by considering the word *'ibada* (worship): "To do what is beautiful is that you *worship* God as if you see Him."

As noted earlier, the word *'ibada* comes from the same root as *'abd* (servant). We can also translate it as "to serve," or "to be a servant." To worship God is to be his servant and to do what he asks you to do. Here we are not talking about compulsory servanthood, mentioned in this verse: "None is there in the heavens and earth but comes to the Merciful as a servant" (19:93). Rather, *ihsan* demands servanthood that is voluntary, free, and truly devoted.

When the word *worship* is employed in a narrow sense in Islamic texts, it refers to the Five Pillars of Islam and the other acts—such as supplication and remembrance (*dhikr*)—that have a specifically ritual and devotional nature. In this sense of the term, its plural is often employed, and we can translate it as "acts of worship." Jurisprudence frequently divides human activity into two broad categories: Acts of worship and transactions. The first are ritual activities that relate people directly to God, while the second have to do with human interrelationships—such as marriage, inheritance, and contracts—that must be accomplished in keeping with God's instructions.

The Koran uses the term *worship* in a much broader sense than observing the Five Pillars. The word means to take something as one's god and hence to obey the commands and prohibitions of that god. It is to orient one's life and existence in terms of what one considers to be Real. It is to appeal to one's god for guidance and aid, and to give gratitude to one's god for blessings received.

The object of correct worship, of course, is God, and God alone. This is demanded by *tawhid*. In fact, worship is simply the first practical implication of *tawhid*. Since there is no other reality, people must orient themselves to the Real. That orientation of self to a reality that is personal and makes moral claims upon human beings is called worship. Since the necessity of worship follows directly upon *tawhid*, and *tawhid* is the vision inherent in the *fitra* of human beings (and, apparently, in that of the jinn as well), the Koran connects creation directly with worship: "I created the jinn and mankind only to worship Me" (51:56).

In the same way, worship of the one God is the message given to all the prophets, since worship is demanded by *tawhid*:

We sent forth in every nation a messenger: "Worship God, and avoid false gods." (16:36)

We never sent a messenger before thee except that We revealed to him, saying, "There is no god but I, so worship Me." (21:25)

Ask those of Our messengers We sent before thee: Have We appointed gods to be worshipped apart from the Merciful? (43:45)

According to the Koran, when God spoke to Moses from the Burning Bush, he said:

Verily I am God. There is no god but I, so worship Me, and perform the salat in remembrance of Me. (20:14)

The Koran vehemently criticizes the worship of anything other than God, for there is nothing else that is worthy of worship. A god is precisely that which deserves worship and service, and *tawhid* tells us that this quality is possessed by God alone. Only people devoid of intelligence could fail to grasp *tawhid*:

A Book whose signs are made firm and then differentiated, from One Wise, Aware: Worship none but God. (11:2)

Say: "I have only been commanded to worship God, and not to associate anything with Him. To Him I call, and to Him I turn." (13:36)

Why should I not worship Him who gave me my fitra, and unto whom I shall be returned? (36:22)

Fie upon you and what you worship apart from God! Have you no intelligence? (21:67)

Those who worship others have associated others with God and hence have fallen into *shirk*. The god whose worship is criticized is sometimes "caprice," that most dangerous of inner gods that pulls people this way and that according to the whim of the moment.

Say: "I have been forbidden to worship those whom you call upon apart from God." Say: "I do not follow your caprices, or else I would have been misguided." (6:56)

Made I not covenant with you, Children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan—surely he is a clear enemy to you—and that you should worship Me? (36:60)

In short, the Koran considers voluntary servanthood of God a human imperative, and it makes those who serve him properly, who worship him as is his due, the best of human beings. We already know that being a servant is the prerequisite for becoming God's vicegerent. However, this is not ordinary servanthood, but pure, undefiled, and sincere servanthood. Such servants achieve their sincerity through dealing with God as he deserves to be dealt with. But of course, in the last analysis, it is God who purifies the servant. Hence the Koran sometimes refers to those who have been "made sincere": "God's servants made sincere—for them awaits a known provision . . . in the gardens of bliss" (37:40-43).

Seeing God

The Prophet's definition says, "To do what is beautiful is to worship God as if you *see* Him, because if you do not see Him, He sees you." Here the Prophet focuses on the attitude and intention behind the outward activity that is demanded by *islam*. His point is easily understood by thinking about the way we do things in everyday life. For example, the law tells you not to drive over the speed limit. Many people observe the law, but others observe it only because they are afraid there may be a patrol car lurking around the next bend; and if a patrol car happens to be right behind them in traffic, they would not think of exceeding the limit.

The Prophet is saying that people should worship God—that is, observe the Five Pillars and, more generally, do everything that they do—as if God were in a patrol car right behind them. Even if you do not see the patrol car, you can be sure that he is employing devices that no radar detector will ever be able to foil. "God is with you wherever you are" (57:4), and there is no escape.

The attitude demanded by *ihsan* may be dominated by (*tanzih*) or by (*tashbih*), or it may combine the two qualities in equal measure. In the example of the patrol car, we appealed to severity and wrath, the attributes of *tanzih*. "The sultan is the shadow of God"; that is, God viewed as king and commander. The police are the arms of the sultan—the strict enforcers of the law. From this perspective, people worship God because of fear of the consequences if they do not follow the commands that he has issued. They are the Lord's servants and must obey him on penalty of prison—Sijjin, the lowest pit of hell.

But not all activity is motivated by fear. It often happens that people do things out of love and the wish to be close to the object of their love. Then, the motivation is a hope and a trust that is rooted in the attributes of *tashbih*, such as mercy, gentleness, and bounty. When a young man does everything his girlfriend asks him to do, it may be that he is motivated by his desire to marry her. He has a goal in mind that he wants to achieve. What is certain is that he will act differently if she is right there with him, or if she has gone off with her family on vacation. Naturally, when the girlfriend is not around, the boy's efforts relax. But when she returns, his efforts increase.

In these two examples, the motivation for activity is fear of loss and hope for gain. But many Muslims authorities maintain that worshipping God as if you see him means that you forget all thought of either loss or gain. It is sufficient that God is Real and the servant unreal. One must focus upon what is Real and forget the unreal. One must, in other words, have no thought of oneself whatsoever, and think only about God. This is the perfection of remembering God (*dhikr*). It is one thing to remember someone who is far away, and quite another to remember

a person who is present. By living in God's presence, one not only remembers God constantly, but one cannot possibly forget him.

The definition of *ihsan* says that you should worship God "as if you see Him, for, if you do not see Him, nonetheless He sees you." He sees you because He is with you wherever you are. But notice that the definition says, "if you do not see Him." What if you do see Him? That is the goal of worship. Then, without question, one's worship will be for God's sake alone.

How does one see God? This is a complex issue, one that has been discussed and debated throughout Islamic history. Briefly, we can say that the authorities have answered the question differently depending upon whether their perspective was dominated by *tanzih* or *tashbih*. The Kalam experts, who stress *tanzih*, rejected the possibility of seeing God in this world, although most of them accepted that he can and will be seen in the next world. In contrast, the Sufis, who stress *tashbih*, said that it was possible to see God in this world, not with the eye of the head, but with the eye of the heart. Most of them, however, said that people can never, whether in this world or the next world, see God as he sees himself: They can only see God to the extent that he chooses to show himself to them. If "He is with you wherever you are," then you can see him inasmuch as he is with you, but you cannot necessarily see him as he appears to others or the angels, and certainly not as he appears to himself.

One can say that the goal of *ihsan* is to worship God while actually seeing him. The significance of this goal becomes clear when we remember that the vision of God is the highest bliss of paradise. Nothing in the next world can compare with seeing God. So also, nothing in this world can be compared with the vision of God that is achieved through true *ihsan*.

Sincerity

Ihsan is to act as if one is seeing God. In such a situation, one is aware that nothing can be hidden from God. But the goal is not simply to act as God wants you to act; rather, it is to do things for God's sake alone. This is *tawhid* put into practice. Since there is no reality but the Real, all activity and thought should conform to the Real. One of the motivations for achieving this conformity is the understanding that God is present, which means not only that he sees what you do, but also that he sees what you think. God knows everything, whether manifest or hidden, including your most secret thoughts:

God knows what is in your hearts; God is Knowing, Clement.
(33:51)

What, does God not know best what is in the breasts of all the world's inhabitants? (29:10)

He knows what you conceal and what you proclaim. (27:25)



Ihsan demands that people be aware of God's presence and act appropriately, but it also demands that they think, feel, and intend appropriately. It is not enough for outward activity to be correct (that would be simple *islam*); rather, inward thoughts and attitudes must conform exactly with outward activity. There should be no contradiction between what people think and what they do, or between what they are and what they think. The human personality needs to be harmonious, balanced, and whole, without tendencies and impulses pulling in different directions.

This harmony of the person is often called *ikhlas*, which is usually translated as "sincerity." Sincerity is to be the same inside and outside. When a sincere person says something, the words are true and correspond exactly to the person's understanding and faith. So also, the activity of a sincere person displays what the person actually feels and is.

The Arabic word *ikhlas* is never used in the loose sense that the word *sincerity* is used in English. In modern usage, sincerity becomes an excuse for doing anything that makes you feel good. It is to be yourself, to do your own thing. As long as you are sincere—that is, as long as you are true to yourself—whatever you do is fine. This way of looking at things is utterly foreign to Islamic thinking, because *ikhlas* must be established in relationship to God. But the type of sincerity just mentioned is established in relation to the false god that the Koran calls "caprice"; hence, it is a form of *shirk*.

The meaning of *ikhlas* can be grasped with the help of its antonyms. First, it is the opposite of *nifaaq*, which is usually translated as "hypocrisy," but which comes from a root that means "to sell." Literally, *nifaaq* means "trying to sell oneself." A hypocrite, in Islamic terms, is someone who tries to convince people that he is something that he is not. He tries to sell them goods that are not what they seem to be.

A group known as "the hypocrites" played an important role in the Prophet's community at Medina. Outwardly they accepted Islam, but their only real interest was in furthering their personal goals. They did not have faith in God or the Prophet, but they saw that, in that situation, it was expedient to follow the new religion. The Koran employs the word *hypocrite*, often with explicit reference to this group, in thirty verses. But the picture that the Koran draws of hypocrites in general makes them the worst sort of truth-concealers, the lowest of the low. Notice how the verses imply that the hypocrites may be able to deceive the people, but God knows what they really are. He sees into their hearts, and they have forgotten that God is with them wherever they are:

When the hypocrites come to thee they say, "We bear witness that thou art indeed the messenger of God." And God knows that thou

art indeed His messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are truly liars. They have taken their oaths as a covering, then they have blocked the way of God. (63:1-2)

The hypocrites, men and women, are as one another: they bid to dishonor and forbid honor. They keep their hands shut. They have forgotten God, and He has forgotten them. The hypocrites—they are the transgressors. God has promised the hypocrites, men and women, and the truth-concealers, the fire of Gehenna, therein to dwell forever. That is enough for them. God has cursed them, and there awaits for them a lasting chastisement. (9:67-68)

The second word that is employed as the opposite of *ikhlas* is *riya'*, which comes from a root meaning "to see" and which means "to make a false show of something," or "to display oneself in a way that one is not." Again, the sense is that people do good deeds outwardly that are belied by the intention behind the activity. They are not acting for God's sake, but to impress people or to curry favor with someone. The Koran uses the term to describe the activity of the hypocrites:

The hypocrites seek to trick God, but God is tricking them. When they stand up for the ritual prayer, they stand up reluctantly, to make a show for the people, and they remember God only a little. (4:142)

Sincere activity must be done for God's sake alone. Thus, for example, the Koran recommends giving charity to people in addition to the obligatory alms tax. But for this to be true charity, it must be given for God's sake, not for the sake of showing people how generous and pious you are. Moreover, you must never make those to whom you give charity feel indebted to you. After all, it is God who gives them the gift. They should feel indebted to God for everything good. But if you try to make them feel indebted to you, your act is sullied by an ulterior motive. Both you and they lose sight of *tawhid*.

In this context, the Koran sometimes employs the verb *manna*, which means "to try to make people feel that they owe you a favor." For example, you give your friend a nice compact disc player as a birthday gift. Then, you keep on reminding your friend how generous you were, hoping, of course, to gain some benefit for yourself, or simply to have the feeling of satisfaction that you are such a wonderful person. Your activity toward your friend shows that the gift was not actually a gift, but a payment for favors expected. The Koran explicitly prohibits this kind of wrongdoing, saying that to make people feel obliged and to hurt them by reminding them of your kindness is to negate the gift:

O you who have faith, do not void your acts of charity by imposing favors and hurting, as does he who spends his wealth to make a show for the people and has no faith in God and the Last Day. (2:264)

Part of sincerity, then, is not to make a show for people, but to do things for God's sake alone, and without telling anyone about it. A hadith tells us that "Acts of charity in secret extinguish God's wrath." People must neither show people how good they are, nor try to show God and his Prophet how good they are. If trying to make people acknowledge the favor they owe you is bad, it is far worse—and far stupider—to try to make the Prophet or God feel obliged because you have followed the revealed message. In fact, you are the one who is being benefited by submission and faith, not they; you should be showing gratitude, not they:

They count it as a favor to you that they have become Muslims. Say: "Do not count your submission as a favor to me. No, God confers a favor on you in that He has guided you to faith, if you are truthful." (49:17)

Let us come back to the word *ikhlas* itself. *Ikhlas* derives from a root that means "to be clear, pure, and free from admixture." Literally, *ikhlas* means "to purify, to clarify, to refine, to remove all impurities." The Koran uses the word itself in only one passage, in the phrase "purify their religion for God." It tells us that the hypocrites can reform themselves by freeing their religion—that is their practice and their faith—from all extraneous elements. One might say, "Well, this applies only to the hypocrites, not to me." But this is to forget that everyone is a hypocrite, so long as caprice and other false gods have the slightest influence on their thinking and activity:

Surely the hypocrites will be in the lowest level of the Fire—you will not find for them there any helper—save such as repent, do what is wholesome, hold fast to God, and purify their religion for God. They are with the faithful, and God will give the faithful a mighty wage. (4:145-46)

Notice that the Koran places the hypocrites in the deepest pit of hell. This certainly indicates the ugliness of hypocrisy in Muslim eyes, and, by contrast, the beauty of sincerity. A hadith makes the same point in more colorful language.

One day the Prophet was sitting with a few of his companions when suddenly there was a loud crash. Everyone was startled except the Prophet. They looked around, and one or two of them exclaimed, "What was that?" The Prophet said in a matter-of-fact way, "Oh, that was a

stone that was thrown into hell seventy autumns ago and has just hit bottom." His companions looked at each other in bewilderment. A few moments later, someone ran up and said that so-and-so, one of the well known hypocrites, had just died: He was seventy years old.

In several verses the Koran employs the terms *mukhlis* and *mukhlas*, which are adjectives derived from *ikhlas*. The first means "purifying," or "having sincerity," and the second means "purified," or "having been given sincerity [by God]." In ten of the eleven instances where the former adjective is employed, it is associated with the word *religion*, as in the above verse, and it is also associated with worship:

We have sent down upon thee the Book with the Truth. So worship God, purifying thy religion for Him. (39:2)

Say: "I have been commanded to worship God, purifying my religion for Him." (39:11)

Set your faces in every place of prostration and call upon Him, purifying your religion for Him. (7:29)

He is the Alive, there is no god but He. So call upon Him, purifying your religion for Him. (40:65)

Even sincerity is not necessarily pure. In some verses the Koran describes how people can be faced with danger and then turn toward God, "purifying their religion for Him." Then, when the danger is past, they go back to their old ways. This is not true sincerity, since it has no constancy:

When they embark in the ships, they call on God, purifying their religion for Him. But when He has delivered them to the land, they associate others with Him, that they may be ungrateful truth-concealers in what We have given them and take their enjoyment. They will soon know! (29:65-66)

In the last analysis, real sincerity cannot be achieved by human beings: It has to be given by God. Just as none guides but God and none misguides but God, so also none establishes the purity of religion but God. This is suggested especially in one of the eight verses in which the Koran employs the term *mukhlas* (purified). It says about Moses, "He was purified, and he was a messenger and a prophet" (19:51). To be God's prophet, a human being must first have been purified by God himself.

In the remaining seven verses where the Koran employs the term *mukhlas*, it uses the expression "purified servants." These are human beings who enter paradise or are protected from Satan's deceptions. The fact that they are God's "servants" gives us further insight into what

servanthood involves. It is a total devotion to God alone, in which all one's faith and practice are focused upon the One. There is no place left for caprice or the worship of others.

Ikhlas, in short, is the human embodiment of *tawhid*. This helps explain why sura 112 of the Koran is called both the sura of *ikhlas* and the sura of *tawhid*. When human beings live *tawhid* to its fullest, they are *mukhlis* and *mukhlis*; they both purify their religion for God alone, and God in turn aids them by purifying them of attention to everything other than himself.

God-wariness

Among the near synonyms of *ih-san*, perhaps the most important is *taqwa*, which we have been translating as "god-wariness." Koran translators have rendered the term with such expressions as *dutifulness*, *piety*, *righteousness*, *good conduct*, *guarding against evil*, *godfearing*, and *god-consciousness*. The Koran refers to the god-wary in far more verses than it mentions either the sincere or those with *ih-san*. The word itself means "to protect, to be wary, to be careful, to take good care of." It is clearly an attitude that epitomizes every human good and, in the Koranic context, this good must be focused upon God. The Koran says, "The noblest of you in God's sight is the one with the most *taqwa*" (49:13).

The Koran frequently commands people to have *taqwa*, and commonly the verb takes God as object. Then we translate it as "Be wary of God." Others might render it as "Be dutiful toward God, be conscious of God, be pious toward God, be godfearing." The implication of the term is that one protects oneself by always keeping God in view. In other words, whenever you say something or do something, you do it "as if you see God." You are very careful about this, because you know that God sees not only your actions, but also your thoughts:

If you do what is beautiful and are god-wary—surely God is aware of what you do. (4:128)

Be wary of God, and know that God sees what you do. (2:233)

Be wary of God. Surely God knows the thoughts in the breasts. (5:7)

One of the implications of the word *taqwa* is that people have to protect themselves from something dangerous. Hence, the Koran often makes the object of the word not God himself, but *his threats, punishment, chastisement, and warning*. And the Koran reminds people that they will have to face God and answer to him for their actions:

Be wary of the Fire, whose fuel is people and stones. (2:24)

Be wary of God, and know that God is severe in punishment. (2:196)

Be wary of God, and know that you will be mustered to Him. (2:203)

Be wary of God, and know that you will encounter Him. And give good news to the faithful. (2:223)

Be wary of a day when no soul shall give satisfaction for any other soul. (2:48, 2:123)

O people, be wary of your Lord, and fear a day when no father shall give satisfaction for his child, and no child shall give any satisfaction for his father. Surely God's promise is true. So let not the life of this world delude you, and let not the Deluder delude you concerning God. (31:33)

Say: "God I worship, purifying my religion for Him. Worship then what you like apart from Him." Say: "Surely the losers are they who lose themselves and their families on the day of resurrection. . . . Above them they shall have shadows of the Fire, and below them shadows. With this God frightens His servants: 'O My servants, be wary of Me!'" (39:14-16)

The path of god-wariness is clearly the path brought by the messengers, the path delineated by God's signs:

In the alternation of night and day, and what God has created in the earth—surely there are signs for a god-wary people. (10:6)

God makes clear His signs to the people. Perhaps they will be god-wary. (2:187)

Even so, We have sent it down as an Arabic Koran, and We have turned about in it something of threats. Perhaps they will be god-wary. (20:113)

This is My path, straight. So follow it, and follow not [any other] paths, lest they scatter you from His path. This then He has charged you with. Perhaps you will become god-wary. (6:153)

When people protect themselves from God's wrath and severity by following the prophets, they are brought under the wing of God's mercy and gentleness. In other words, the fruit of god-wariness is paradise:

servants by raising them up into his presence. Only in terms of their nearness to him can they be worthy of being his vicegerents. Those who are wary of God will be taken into the proximity of the Merciful, but those who fail in their duties will remain under the sway of the Severe in punishment: "On the day that We shall muster the god-vary to the Merciful as guests, and drive the wrongdoers into Gehenna as herds . . ." (19:85-86).

In one verse, the Koran draws a clear distinction between two kinds of divine mercy. In the broader sense, mercy refers to God's kindness and gentleness to all of creation, for he brings it into existence through no merit of its own. In a narrower sense, mercy refers to the nearness that is given to the god-wary. Then it is contrasted with God's chastisement, which he inflicts upon those who have chosen to stay distant from him. Or rather, as we have already seen, their distance from God is itself chastisement, because to be far from the wholeness and harmony of the Real is to be overcome by the partiality and chaos of the unreal. *May God, who is the God of the god-wary, forgive the god-wary.*

I strike with My chastisement whomever I will. And My mercy embraces all things, but I will prescribe it for those who are god-wary and pay the alms tax, and those who have faith in Our signs, those who follow the Messenger, the prophet of the unlettered, about whom they find written in the Torah and the Gospel. He bids them to honor and forbids them dishonor, making lawful for them the pleasant things and making unlawful for them the foul and loathsome things, and relieving them of their burdens and the fetters that were upon them. Those who have faith in him, venerate him, and help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him—those are the prosperous. (7:156-57)

Love

One of the words that is most closely connected to everything implied by *ihsan* is *hubb* (love). Especially in later times, when *ihsan* comes to be discussed as one of Islam's three dimensions, love is placed at center stage. In one word, what is the right attitude of the human being toward God? Love.

To understand the Islamic conception of love, we first must see how the Koran employs the term. Most importantly, what does love have to do with God? Once we have an understanding of God's love, it becomes easier to grasp what human love implies.

The Koran ascribes love to God in about fifteen verses, and in several more verses, it tells us what God does *not* love. If human love is to have any meaning in relation to God, it certainly has to follow God's example.

Be wary of what is before you and what is behind you. Perhaps you will find mercy. (36:45)

The faithful are brothers, so make things wholesome among your brothers. Perhaps you will find mercy. (49:10)

If you do what is wholesome and are god-wary, surely God is Forgiving, Compassionate. (4:129)

Whoever is god-wary and does what is wholesome—no fear shall be upon them, neither shall they grieve. (7:35)

Have faith in God and His messengers. If you have faith and are god-wary, there shall be for you a mighty wage. (3:179)

O faithful, be wary of God, and have faith in His messenger. He will give you a twofold portion of His mercy, and He will appoint for you a light whereby you shall walk, and forgive you. God is Forgiving, Compassionate. (57:28)

For those that are god-wary, with their Lord are gardens through which rivers flow. (3:15)

The Garden . . . is the ultimate abode of the god-wary, and the ultimate abode of the truth-concealers is the Fire. (13:35)

The way to achieve god-wariness is to "worship God", that is, to establish lawhîd by being God's perfect servants:

Worship God! You have no god but He. Will you not be god-wary? (7:65, 23:32)

O you who have faith, worship your Lord who created you and those before you. Perhaps you will be god-wary. (2:21)

The picture of *tagwa* drawn by the Koran provides a clear illustration of the relationship between the attributes of *tanzih* and *tashbih*. God-wariness focuses on God's threats and punishment. Hence, it exemplifies the correct relationship between the servant and his Lord, the subject and his King. The God of which people should be wary is the God of severity and wrath. He is the God who is far away from them and worthy of the utmost awe and fear.

Once people establish the relationship of *tanzih*, the result is not that they stay distant from God, but rather that God brings them close to himself. His mercy and gentleness respond to the lowliness of the

A hadith that we have already quoted helps situate the concept of love in the context in which it was understood by the tradition. The Prophet said, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty." In later times, the object of love is invariably said to be something beautiful and, conversely, if something is beautiful, it is worthy of love. There is no reason to suppose that this understanding of love is not already implicit in the Koran. *Jamal*, the dictionaries tell us, is practically synonymous with *husn*. To have *ihsan* is to do what is beautiful. Five of the fourteen Koranic verses in which God is said to love something mention those who have *ihsan*. If God loves them, it is surely because, by doing what is beautiful, they themselves have beautiful character traits and are worthy of God's love.

In every Koranic instance where God is said to love something, the objects of his love are human beings. But these are specific human beings, not the human race in general. God loves those human beings whose character traits and activities are beautiful:

Do what is beautiful! Surely God loves those who do what is beautiful. (2:195)

Vie with one another, hastening to forgiveness from your Lord, and to a Garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the god-wary, who give alms in both ease and adversity and who restrain their anger and pardon people. God loves those who do what is beautiful. (3:133-34)

Whoso fulfills his covenant and is wary of God—surely God loves the god-wary. (3:76)

There is no fault in those who have faith and do wholesome deeds in what they eat, if they are god-wary, have faith, and do wholesome deeds, and then are god-wary and have faith, and then are god-wary and do what is beautiful. God loves those who do what is beautiful. (5:93)

Truly God loves those who repent, and He loves those who cleanse themselves. (2:222)

Trust in God. God loves those who have trust. (3:159)

Make things wholesome among them equitably, and be just. Surely God loves the just. (49:9)

Such verses provide a good idea of which character traits are desirable and praiseworthy. In contrast, the twenty-three Koranic verses that mention what God does *not* love speak of blameworthy human

qualities. Thus, for example, we are not surprised to learn that God does not love the truth-concealers, the wrongdoers, the workers of corruption, the transgressors, the immoderate, the proud, and the boastful.

One of the most significant points about the Koranic use of the word *love* is that the quality is ascribed to God and to human beings, and to nothing else; and God's love is always directed at human beings. Many authorities maintain that, more than any other quality, love designates the special relationship between God and human beings, or the real meaning of the Trust given only to human beings. Human beings alone can be the object of God's love, and only human beings can love him.

However, God does not love human beings whose love is not directed at him. Human beings can love God, but usually their love is directed at others:

No indeed, but you honor not the orphan . . . and you love possessions with an ardent love. (89:17-20)

Surely they love this hasty world. (76:27)

Made attractive to people is the love of things they crave—women, children, heaped-up heaps of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle, and tillage. That is the enjoyment of the life of this world. But God—with Him is the beautiful homecoming. (3:14)

In other words, people should not love the fleeting beauty that attracts their cravings, but they should love the permanent beauty of God. The cure for everything that ails human beings can be found in redirecting their love toward its true object.

Here, once again, we encounter the fundamental significance of prophecy. How can people love a God about whom they know nothing? And once they come to know that God is lovable, what do they do next? In the Koranic view, once the first spark of love for God lights up, the way is clear. The person must follow the Sunna of the Prophet. Only then can people move toward God through right practice, right faith, and doing what is beautiful. Having imitated the Prophet not only in activity, but also in character, they will be worthy of God's love. Through God's love, they will reach salvation. Thus God commands the Prophet to utter these words:

Say: "If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is Forgiving, Compassionate." Say: "Obey God and the Messenger." But if they turn their backs, God loves not the truth-concealers. (3:31-32)

Though the Koran rarely mentions love for God, the few verses in which it does mention it take on a great deal of importance for the later tradition. One verse in particular is constantly quoted. In it, two points are made that are especially significant: First, that God wants people to love him. And second, that their love for him follows upon his love for them. Although in the just quoted verse, human love is mentioned as preceding divine love, the vision of *tawhid* does not allow anyone to imagine that human love is possible, unless it has been instigated by God. How could anyone love God without the intervention of his mercy, compassion, and guidance? How could anyone even exist without God's mercy and love?

O you who have faith, should any of you turn back on your religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, who are humble toward the faithful and disdainful toward the truth-concealers, who struggle in the path of God and fear not the blame of any blamer. That is God's bounty—He gives it to whomsoever He will. He is All-embracing, All-knowing. (5:54)

The gift of love, this verse tells us, is God's bounty, and hence it is tied back to the attributes of gentleness, mercy, and beauty.

Wholesomeness

Islam or the Shariah is concerned with differentiating right activity from wrong activity and explaining how to do things correctly. It discusses sin inasmuch as sin means breaking the commandments of God. It deals with the issue of good works inasmuch as good works mean following God's instructions and imitating the Prophet.

Iman adds a dimension of understanding. It allows people to see that the meaning of activity transcends the domain of everyday life and reaches back into the divine reality. It lets them understand that everything in the universe is governed by *tawhid*, yet human freedom of choice can upset the balance. It tells them why they should be God's servants and explains which path they should follow to become his vicegerents. It makes clear that human activity is deeply rooted in the Real, and that this has everlasting repercussions after death.

Ihsan adds to *islam* and *iman* a focus on intentionality. It directs human beings to reorient their desiring and their choosing on the basis of an awareness of God's presence in all things.

The Koran and the Islamic tradition sometimes differentiate among these three dimensions—*ihsan*, *islam*, *iman*—and sometimes they do not. The Koran in particular frequently employs terminology that can be understood as emphasizing two or three dimensions of Islam at once, and it would be helpful to look at one of these terms in order to show how the very idea of "good works" as discussed in the Koran is

inseparable from Islam's third dimension, even if the discussion seems to be focusing on the first dimension. The term we have in mind is *salih*, from a root that means "to be sound, wholesome, right, proper, good." We have been rendering the root as "wholesome" in the attempt to find an English equivalent that can be used both to refer to people and to acts, since the Koran uses both the form *salihat* (wholesome deeds) and *salihun* (wholesome people).

According to the Koran, doing wholesome deeds, along with faith, will yield paradise. In the first verse cited below, the formula employed—"There is no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve"—is the same the Koran employs for God's friends (10:62). Notice that in some of the verses, wholesome is associated with beautiful:

Whoever has faith in God and the Last Day and does wholesome deeds—they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve. (2:62; cf. 5:69)

Give good news to those who have faith and do wholesome deeds that they will have Gardens through which rivers flow. (2:25)

Whoso does wholesome deeds, be it male or female, and has faith, We shall assuredly give him a pleasant life, and We shall recompense them with their wage according to the most beautiful of what they did. (16:97)

Whoso does wholesome deeds, be it male or female, and has faith—those shall enter the Garden, therein provided for without reckoning. (40:40)

Those who have faith and do wholesome deeds, them We shall admit to gardens through which rivers flow. (4:57, 4:122)

Whoso has faith in God and works wholesome deeds, He shall acquit him of his ugly deeds and cause him to enter the Garden. (64:9)

Who is more beautiful in speech than he who calls to God and does wholesome deeds, and says, "Surely I am among the Muslims"? Not equal are the beautiful deed and the ugly deed. Repel [the ugly] with that which is more beautiful. (41:33-34)

Another fifty verses could be quoted that say basically the same thing. However, let us look at what the Koran says about wholesome people, that is, those who have faith and do wholesome deeds. First, it is not without significance that this word is the name of an ancient, non-Biblical Arab prophet, whom the Koran mentions in eight verses. The

Koran also enumerates several of the prophets as being among the wholesome, including Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Ishmael, Idris, John, Zachariah, Elias, and Jesus. In one verse the Koran places the wholesome, the prophets, the sincere devotees, and the witnesses among those whom God has blessed (4:69). But any sincere *muslim* can be one of the wholesome, whether or not the person is a Muslim.

Some of the People of the Book are an upright nation, who recite God's signs in the watches of the night while prostrating themselves. They have faith in God and the Last Day, they bid to honor and forbid dishonor, and they vie with one another in good deeds. They are among the wholesome. (3:113-14)

Those who have faith and do wholesome deeds, them We shall surely admit among the wholesome. (29:9)

Wholesomeness clearly derives from God's mercy, since it results in nearness to God (cf. 21:75, 21:86, 27:19). Interestingly, in three verses where the Koran mentions Abraham as being among the wholesome, it adds "in the next world." Abraham is the model of human perfection, embodied *fitra*, the father of monotheism, and the prophet who is understood as the closest in character traits to Muhammad. The implication is that all *muslims* who attain to fullness of *fitra* will be among the wholesome in the next world, and that wholesomeness is predominantly a next-worldly quality. After all, to do wholesome deeds is to integrate one's activity into the One; it is to establish *tawhid*. Its full ramifications cannot be seen until vision becomes clear after death.

In short, when the Koran employs the term *wholesome deed*, it is saying that not only is the deed correct, but the intention is also correct. Hypocrites can act correctly, but their reward is to be thrown into the deepest pit of hell.

The Koran employs other words from the same root that are significant if we want to understand the full import of wholesomeness for the Islamic consciousness. For example, the word *islah* is used in thirty verses to mean "establishing wholesomeness." In modern times, the word has often been used to mean "reform." Likewise, the word *sulh* is used in one verse in the sense of the "peace" and "harmony" that should ideally be established between husband and wife. In later times, the word comes to mean "peace" in a political sense.

More implications of the Koranic use of the word *wholesome* can be understood if we look at how the Koran employs its opposite, *fasid*, which means "corrupt, ruined, evil, wrong." The wholesome are those who live in harmony with the Real and establish wholesomeness through their activity. In contrast, the *mufsidun* (workers of corruption) are those who destroy the right relationships among things.

The Koran makes the connection between corruption and the upsetting of *tawhid* rather explicit. First, it insists that the order and wholesomeness of the universe depend upon its having a single principle. If there were more than a single source of reality, the universe would disintegrate into chaos: "Why, were there gods in earth and heaven other than God, these two would surely be corrupted" (21:22).

We know that among the worst false gods that people worship is caprice. If God followed people's caprices—their desires and personal judgments about what is right and wrong—this would take the universe to ruin: "Had the Real followed their caprices, the heavens and the earth and everyone within them would have been corrupted" (23:71).

On one level, the order and wholesomeness of the universe are preserved by God, the One. All things are *muslims* and God's servants. On another level, that of voluntary *islam* and voluntary servanthood, people are able to upset the wholesomeness of the earth and work corruption. The Koran never suggests that human corruption can extend into the heavens, since that is the domain of the angels, who can only submit to God. This helps explain why the angels protested at Adam's creation and said, "What, wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?" (2:30). As angels, they were incapable of working corruption. Corruption is only a possibility among those made of clay. If the angels had bodies of clay, they too could work corruption—as Harut and Marut found out, to their regret.

In the universal order, corruption is a human prerogative. Vicegerency alone gives creatures the freedom to work against the Creator. Only the misapplied Trust can explain how moral evil can appear in the universe. Even Iblis worked no corruption before the creation of Adam. The freedom of the jinn to disobey God is somehow bound up with human vicegerency. The following verse seems particularly appropriate in the modern world. Its full significance could hardly have been grasped before modern technology and industrial pollution made the self-destruction of the human race a distinct possibility:

Corruption has appeared on the land and in the sea because of what people's hands have earned, so that He may let them taste some part of what they have done, and so that perhaps they may return. (30:41)

Why should corruption have appeared as the result of modern science and technology? From the Islamic point of view, this should be easy to understand, even if most modernized Muslims have embraced science and technology as their own, accepting its value without question. What, after all, is the self-professed goal of the fathers of modern science and the proponents of technological progress? We have all heard it said a thousand times that the modern West has finally learned how to conquer nature, and this gives us our superiority over all other

civilizations. Underlying this type of statement is the assumption that we as human beings have a right to do with nature what we want. Yet, in the Islamic view, nature is the theater in which God displays his signs. Every attempt people make to change the way things naturally happen is an act of insubordination to God's will in creation. For people to attempt to control nature is for them to reject submission to God's will; it is to be ungrateful toward God for the situation in which he has placed them and to claim that his wisdom is not present within events. By nature here we do not mean simply that which is outside the cities—the whole visible cosmos is "nature," and that includes society and human individuals.

Here people will naturally protest that our own human gifts are part of nature. God himself has given us the power to control nature and to improve society, so how could we not make use of it? Why should we simply submit to whatever catastrophe befalls us? The Islamic answer is that God sets down the limits for the use of this power, because this power is nothing but the outward manifestation of human vicegerency. People in fact are not free to act any way they think best; or rather, they are free to try to do so, but they have to accept the consequences of their activity. When action is a rejection of both the universal *islam* that rules all of creation as well as the more specific, prophetic *islam* that is embodied in religious forms, the result can only be disaster in this world and the next.

What then is the remedy for the problems of human society? How can hunger, disease, oppression, pollution, and a thousand other human-produced ills be cured? In the Koranic view, there can be no other route than to return to God through religion (*islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*): "So set your face to the upright religion before there comes a day from God that cannot be turned back" (30:43). God measures out both the good and the evil, the wholesome and the corrupt. But, as we have already seen, people have enough freedom to make their own choices and to be called to account for what they have done. To the extent that they choose the wrong and the corrupt, they displease God. God loves those who do what is beautiful, not those who do what is ugly:

When he turns his back, he hurries about the earth to work corruption there and destroy the tillage and the stock. God loves not corruption. (2:205)

The Koran frequently stigmatizes the workers of corruption. Among the worst of them are the hypocrites, who claim to be doing good deeds but whose outward demeanor is belied by their inner intentions. The following verses show clearly that wholesomeness, like sincerity, demands that the good deed be motivated by faith and god-wariness:

Among the people are some who say, "We have faith in God and the Last Day," but they do not have faith. They seek to deceive God, but they are deceiving only themselves, and they are unaware. In their hearts is a disease, so God increased their disease, and theirs is a painful chastisement because they are liars. When it is said to them, "Work not corruption in the earth," they say, "We are only doing wholesome deeds." Surely they are workers of corruption, but they are unaware. (2:8-12)

Corruption comes about in the earth when human beings, God's vicegerents in the earth, turn away from his commands and forget the messages of the prophets:

And those who break God's covenant after His compact, and who snap what God has commanded to be joined, and who work corruption in the earth—their shall be the curse, and theirs is the ugly abode. (13:25)

Corruption in the earth is effaced when people orient themselves toward God through *tawhid*; when they set up priorities in this world in terms of the next world. Only by taking the next world into account can people have a grasp of the whole of reality and understand the ultimate significance of their activity:

Seek, amidst what God has given you, the abode of the next world, and forget not your portion of this world. And do what is beautiful, as God has done what is beautiful to you. And seek not to work corruption in the earth. Surely God loves not the workers of corruption. (28:77)

What God does love is doing what is beautiful. Because of his love for those who do the beautiful, he brings them near to himself, and this nearness is typically called "the Garden" or "God's mercy":

Work not corruption in the earth after it has been made wholesome, and call upon God in fear and hope. Surely the mercy of God is near to those who do what is beautiful. (7:56)

In sum, the Koran presents us, through the concepts of "wholesomeness" and "corruption," with a picture of the human role in creation that distinguishes right activity, right thought, and right intention from their opposites. It provides one more example of how the two hands of God—his mercy and his wrath—are reflected in the human domain, the

domain of the earth, this lower realm where people have been appointed God's vicegerents. It associates wholesomeness with mercy, paradise, and the beautiful, while it connects corruption to wrath, hell, and the ugly.

Establishing wholeness, wholesomeness, and beauty depends upon the full engagement of the human being with the Real. The truly wholesome are those who act both as God's perfect servants and his perfect vicegerents.

Chapter 8.

THE HISTORICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF *IHSAN*



Supplication

It is difficult to find doorways into peoples' souls, especially in a civilization that does not encourage the writing down of inner experiences. Autobiography is a relatively rare genre in Islamic literature, and what little there is seldom analyzes the authors' motives and intentions, especially not in terms of religious categories. However, there is one genre of writing where people do open themselves up; not to others, but to God. This is "supplication" (*du'a*), the personal calling upon God. Of course, as soon as a supplication is written down, one can assume that it has lost some of its spontaneity. Nevertheless, supplications voice the concerns that Muslims have in trying to establish a right relationship with God.

Supplication is an important subgenre already in the Hadith. Many of the Prophet's personal prayers were remembered and written down. In many cases, he taught others how to call upon God, and in other cases, people heard him repeating the same prayer on several occasions and memorized it. Many of the Prophet's descendants also left

supplications, especially his great-grandson, Ali ibn al-Husayn, whose *al-Sahifat al-sajjadiyya* is considered the classic text of the genre and provides unparalleled insight into the world of early Muslim personal relationships with God.

The recitation of the supplications that have been transmitted from the Prophet and other great Muslims is one way for people to imitate their predecessors in talking with God and in trying to establish the right attitudes toward God. In addition, they may feel that they are establishing a personal nearness to the author of the prayers.

One of the first things that one notices in reading supplications is that the abstract language and perspective of *tanzih* that is typical of early Muslim theological writing are totally lacking. God is not a distant monarch who simply issues commands to his slaves and expects them to be obeyed. Quite the contrary, he is present with the worshipper, listening to the supplications, and responding to them. Does he not say in the Koran, "Supplicate Me, and I will respond to you" (40:60)? The God of supplication is, in short, a God who is conceived predominantly in terms of *tasbeih*. It is a God to whom people can relate through love and intimacy. This is a God who is concerned with every detail of human life. People cannot have two domains, one for unimportant things that God does not care about, and another for God's affairs: *Tawhid* demands that God cares about all human affairs. As the Prophet said:

Each of you should ask your Lord for all your needs. He should even ask Him for the thing of his sandal when it breaks.

In many forms of modern Islam, the depth of the personal relationship with God that is encouraged by the Koran and the Islamic tradition is pushed into the background. This is natural as soon as we remember that modernist Islam typically stresses the rational side of Islamic teachings, partly as an apologetic device to fend off Western criticisms of Islam, and partly as a theological principle to allow the integration of modern forms of knowledge—technology in particular—into Islamic countries. We must always remember that theological rationality, by its very nature, stresses *tanzih*, and hence the impersonal and distant sides of God's reality. Nevertheless, supplication still plays a major role in the religious life of Muslims, especially those who have not had the traditional world view altered by modern education. In keeping with the earliest examples, supplication is eminently personal and allows people to see their intimate relationship with God in every dimension of life. Take, for example, this supplication, chosen at random from Ali ibn al-Husayn's *al-Sahifat al-sajjadiyya* and entitled, "His Supplication in Asking for Water during a Drought":

O God,
 water us with rain,
 unfold upon us Thy mercy
 through Thy copious rain
 from the driven clouds,
 so that Thy goodly earth may grow
 on all horizons!
 Show kindness to Thy servants
 through the ripening of the fruit,
 revive Thy land
 through the blossoming of the flowers,
 and let Thy angels—the noble scribes—be witness
 to a beneficial watering from Thee
 lasting in its abundance,
 plenty in its flow,
 heavy, quick, soon,
 through which Thou revivest what has vanished,
 bringest forth what is coming,
 and providest plentiful foods,
 through heaped up, wholesome, productive clouds,
 in reverberating layers,
 the rain's downpour
 not without cease,
 the lightning's flashes
 not without fruit!
 O God,
 give us water
 through rain,
 helping, productive, fertilizing,
 widespread, plentiful, abundant,
 bringing back the risen,
 restoring the broken!
 O God,
 give us water with a watering through which Thou wilt
 fill the cisterns,
 flood the rivers,
 make the trees grow,
 bring down prices in the lands,
 invigorate the beasts and the creatures,
 perfect for us the agreeable things of provision,
 make grow for us the fields,
 let flow for us the tears,
 and add for us strength to our strength!
 O God,
 make not the cloud's shadow over us a burning wind,

*allow not its coldness to be cutting,
let not its pouring down upon us be a stoning,
and make not its waters for us bitter!*
O God,
*bless Muhammad and his Household,
and provide us with the blessings of the heavens and the earth!*
"Thou art powerful over everything" [3:26].¹

Art and Poetry

Islamic art is a vast field, and every beginning student of Islam should make a point of examining one or more of the numerous illustrated books that present some of the treasures of Islamic civilization. For the purpose of our discussion, we will only cover a few of the reasons for the specific developments that took place in various art forms in Islamic civilization and the significance of these developments from the perspective of Islam's three dimensions.²

The major contours of Islamic art are implicit in the form of the Koran, the Word of God. God expressed himself to the Islamic community through speech. In order to preserve and maintain God's speech, the Muslims had three fundamental duties: To recite the Koran, to copy the Koran, and to embody the Koran through the *salat* and other rituals.

As we already know, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty," and "God loves those who do what is beautiful." Muslims with any sensitivity toward beauty have attempted to do things beautifully. Recitation of the Koran gave rise to the arts of the voice, copying the Koran gave rise to the arts of the pen, and embodying the Koran gave rise to the arts of the ritual environment. To be more explicit, the three major arts in Islam are rhythmical recitation and poetry, calligraphy, and architecture.

The Koran, we said earlier, is not just read; it is recited. Beautiful voices are highly prized, since everyone recognizes that the more beautifully the Koran is recited, the more awe-inspiring and joy-inducing it is for everyone concerned and, of course, the more the message will be appreciated. Most people were taught at least some of the Koran from a very early age. Children went to Koran school, where they would learn recitation (not reading) and calligraphy (not writing).

In dealing with the Koran, there is a proper mode of conduct (*adab*) that people observe. A book that is God's own speech deserves the highest possible respect. The Koran is never placed directly on the ground. In a library, it is put on the highest shelf, in a place of honor. People should not touch the Koran if they are ritually impure. They often kiss it or place it upon their eyes after picking it up and before putting it down. Before reciting, they say (in accordance with the command of Koran 16:98), "I seek refuge in God from Satan the ac-

cursed." When they recite it, they try to do so with proper courtesy. Since the Koran is the most eloquent of books, it should be recited in a mode in which its eloquence comes out; every letter and every vowel must be pronounced impeccably; the beautiful ways of reciting it, handed down orally by Koran reciters from earliest times, are much studied and imitated.³

If the Koran deserves the utmost respect in recitation, so also is the case with writing it. Arabic calligraphy developed into the primary visual art of Islamic civilization because Islam is built on the Koran, and the form in which the Koran is presented must accord with the beauty of its Speaker.⁴

Finally, the Koran needs a worthy building in which to be recited and embodied. The mosque (place of prostration) became an institution in Islam from the beginning. Any place that is ritually pure can be a mosque, of course, and the Prophet said that one of the ways in which his prophecy was distinguished from that of earlier prophets was that the whole face of the earth was designated as the mosque of his community. Nevertheless, the faithful need a place to gather for the incumbent Friday communal prayer, and it is highly recommended at all times to pray the five prescribed *salats* in community; so the mosque soon developed into a place worthy for the recitation of God's Word. The Koran resonated within its walls, and much of the decoration of the mosque is typically provided by Koranic calligraphy.

Beautiful recitation is naturally rhythmic. Rhythm, in turn, depends upon harmony and balance. Behind every attractive rhythm lurks at least an intuitive understanding of the nature of number, or more precisely, of the nature of the relationship of the many to the one. So also, Islamic calligraphy expresses the spoken word through visual harmony and balance. It demonstrates in sensory form the beauty of the divine Word.

What strikes Westerners the first time they encounter Islamic art is the relative lack of naturalism and representationalism in general, and the total lack of sculpture. Partly, this has to do with the prohibitions of figurative art issued by the Prophet, but the Prophet's prohibitions themselves simply manifest the implications of *tawhid* in its Islamic form. The divine art that people can and should imitate is the Koran, which is God's self-expression, the aural and oral embodiment of the divine form in which human beings were created. All attention needs to be focused on the revelation, since that is the sole route of guidance. To the extent that people's attention is distracted from the divine Word, they will fail to actualize their divine form and fall into *shirk*.

Most observers remark on the abstract nature of Islamic art; that is, Islamic art tends not to represent things, but rather ideas. The reason for this becomes clear as soon as we remember that abstraction is a function of reason, and reason, illumined by *tawhid*, sees *tanzih*; reason disengages the divine reality from every created reality. However, art is

by nature imaginal, since it presents us with images. Hence, art is closely connected to *tashbih*, the vision of God's presence in the world. In order to express *tawhid*, artistic forms—which by nature are imaginal and therefore connected to *tashbih*—must be offset by representations of abstract, distant qualities. In other words, the forms must somehow represent beauty as belonging not to themselves, but to God. Islamic art reminds people of the divine beauty by detaching that beauty from this world; that is, from the things that figurative art attempts to represent.

In other words, since there is nothing beautiful but God, Islamic art attempts to represent God's beauty without making the world beautiful in itself; it tries to display the signs of God's beauty while reminding people that these are only signs. *Tanzih*'s abstraction balances *tashbih*'s imagery by detaching beauty from the objects within which it becomes manifest. When an artist represents a figure, the observer will tend to associate the artistic beauty with the figure itself—the face is beautiful, the flower is beautiful, and so forth. When relatively abstract designs are represented in place of created things, this introduces an element of *tanzih*, of separation of the beauty from the representation. One sees that the harmony of forms produces the beauty and can never think that a person or object is beautiful, since none is represented.

Even when representational art begins to play a rather important role in certain parts of the Islamic world, especially Persia and India, it is rarely of a naturalistic sort. Rather, the scenes depicted are usually representations of things not found in the physical world. Often, they recall instead the Koranic accounts of paradise, or sometimes hell. Both paradise and hell are located in the imaginal world. When people look at a Persian miniature, for example, they seldom think that the artist is representing a scene that he has observed with his eyes. It is clearly a landscape, or perhaps a portrait, with otherworldly qualities. For Muslims sensitive to the spirituality that informs their religion—that is, sensitive to the fact that all beauty and all reality belong to God—artistic forms become a way of perceiving the signs even more directly than they are found in the natural world.

In short, Islamic art combines the concreteness of imagination with the abstraction that is implicit in *tanzih*. It represents God's beauty in imaginal forms, yet it manages to disengage these forms from the physical world. It offers a picture of the soul within which the divine image is becoming manifest: The artistic forms are neither spiritual nor bodily, but something in between; something that can only be imagination, which combines the qualities of the two sides.

The Islamic avoidance of figurative representation in the visual arts contrasts sharply with the artistic traditions of the Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist civilizations. These three major civilizations developed depiction of the human form in painting and sculpture as great art forms. In all three cases, the original impulse was to depict the Real in

its human embodiment. Christian art began with icons of Christ, who is considered an incarnation of God. In a similar way, Hindu art depicts the avatars, or the gods themselves (who always have certain human features), while Buddhist art focuses on the enlightened human being: the Buddha, or the bodhisattva. From the Islamic perspective—and remember that Muslims look at these civilizations from the outside—all three of these religious civilizations place too much emphasis upon *tashbih*, both in their myth and in their art. In practical terms, this is reflected in the general revulsion among Muslims toward idol-worship and the general refusal to try to understand that the statues in Hindu and Buddhist temples may not be idols in the Islamic sense. Few are sympathetic with the line by the great Sufi poet Mahmud Shabistari (d. ca. 720/1320): "If the Muslim were to understand what an idol is/he would know that religion is found in idol-worship."

We do not mean to imply that Islamic art is limited to representations of the Koran and its message. We simply want to bring out that the central role of the Koran in Islamic life turned the attention of Muslims toward rhythmic sound, calligraphy, and architectural forms, such that other art forms became secondary.

Music, for example, is a form of rhythmic sound, and it was highly developed in Islamic civilization. In some parts of the Islamic world, it has remained slightly peripheral because of the understanding of some of the ulama that music was prohibited by the Prophet. However, there is no agreement on this prohibition. What the ulama all agree upon is that music has an extremely powerful effect upon the soul, and that it can represent both the beautiful (that which reflects the divine beauty) and the dispersive and fiery (the satanic), not to mention every other human possibility. Hence, music has always remained suspect in the eyes of many Muslims, but the same Muslims may recite the Koran with heavenly voices. If we tell them that this is music, they will reply that music is instrumental, but this is recitation. The Koran is practically never recited with instrumental accompaniment. There is no worthy vehicle for the divine Word but the voice of God's own vicegerent.

The most widespread manifestation of the arts of rhythmic sound in the Islamic world—more widespread even than recitation of the Koran itself—is recitation of poetry. Without doubt, poetry is the prime means of literary expression in Islamic civilization. But many people forget, because of modern habits, that poetry, like the Koran, was never read: It was recited. Even today, a native speaker of a language like Persian or Urdu finds it very difficult to read a line of poetry out loud, unless it is bad poetry. The rhythmic power of good poetry practically forces the reader to recite or chant it. Only people who have lost a sense for the beauty of their own language are not moved by their own classical poetry.

Relatively little Islamic poetry has anything to do with the explicit message of the Koran. The stereotypes are quite accurate: The Persian, Turkish, and Urdu poets never cease talking about nightingales and

roses, winedrinking and drunkenness, and love for their beautiful beloved. When people read this kind of poetry in translation, they quickly get bored, unless the translator happens to have a remarkable poetic gift, or unless the poetry has an epic or didactic content that carries some interest.

In the original languages, however, the situation is quite different. Anyone who has heard a good reciter reciting poetry in one of the Islamic languages knows that the content of the poetry is not the only important element. In the hands of an accomplished artist, poetry captures the imagination through its sound and music, and poetry, in contrast to the Koran, is often recited to the accompaniment of instrumental music, which enhances its power.

Historians of Islamic literature often speak of the secular nature of much of the poetry produced by Muslims. This judgment, however, is usually a bit premature. First, Muslims do not make the same distinction between the religious and the secular, or the sacred and the profane, that has been made in the West. Everything, after all, is a sign of God, but it takes eyes to see the signs. The Koran frequently employs expressions like, "O you who have eyes!" or "O you who have minds!" and it makes clear that it is only the faithful or the god-wary who have these eyes and minds. Scholars of literature may not always fit into this category, and as a result they are likely to see literary forms in secular terms.

The Koranic message, as we have seen, is not limited to commands, prohibitions, and theological pronouncements. On the contrary, one of its primary messages is that people should recognize the beautiful and do what is beautiful. This is not simply a moral beauty, but a visual and auditory beauty as well. Conduct should be beautiful, writing should be beautiful, speaking should be beautiful. For many Muslims, especially the theoreticians of the third dimension—that is, the Sufi authorities—beauty is divine, wherever it is found: It can only serve to remind people of God. By its nature, it stirs up love, and love can never be satisfied by the temporal or the temporary. Love leads to God, the only true beauty. "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty." So also, to the extent that people realize their own divine form, they will love God's beauty and recognize that "There is no beauty but God." Every other beauty can be nothing but a ray of his beauty. Every love for anything at all can only be a love for a ray of beauty and hence, in the last analysis, for God.⁵

But this is a relatively abstract, academic way of explaining why love plays an important role in Muslim experience. Poets speak a language that is much more direct. Rumi, one of the greatest of the Persian Sufi poets, can do a better job of telling us about the true nature of love and beauty. Unfortunately, the entrancing music of his language is impossible to reproduce in English—you simply have to imagine that someone is singing one of the most beautiful melodies you have ever heard—but pay attention to what the singer is saying:

*Anyone madly in love with the dead
has hope for something that lives . . .
Strive in the hope of a Living One
who does not die in a day or two.
Choose not a mean companion out of meanness,
for intimacy of that sort is a borrowed thing.
If your intimates other than God are faithful,
what happened to your father and mother? . . .
Your intimacy with milk and breasts has gone,
your dread of grammar school has gone.
That was a ray upon their being's wall—
the ray has gone back to the Sun.
When that ray falls upon something,
you become its lover, O champion!
Whatever you love in existence
has received a gold plating from God's attributes . . .
The beauty of the counterfeit coin is a borrowed thing—
beneath its beauty lies the substance of ugliness . . .
From now on take water from heaven—
you have seen no faithfulness from the drainpipe!⁶*

To summarize this extremely brief discussion of Islamic art, let us say that the Koranic stress upon goodness and beauty as divine attributes and as desirable human qualities encouraged the development of a great variety of art forms among Muslims. Although the jurists sometimes questioned the legitimacy of some of these forms, by and large Muslims were sufficiently sensitive to Islam's third dimension to recognize that formal beauty is as important and as essential to life as beauty of activity, character, and soul. Human beings were placed in this world to develop their own selves in harmony with the divine form, and thereby to gain nearness to God. This desired nearness has standards on every level. Activity has to measure up to the rulings of the Shariah, understanding has to harmonize with the sciences of faith, and character needs to be shaped by *ihsan*, sincerity, and god-wariness. Such an all-embracing vision of things could not leave the physical environment outside its view. There, the standard by which everything needs to be judged is beauty, but a beauty defined and shaped by the implications of *tawhid*.

The outward beauty manifest in the artistic domain simply reflects the inward beauty of God. The human soul should measure up to its divine form not only by doing what is morally beautiful, but also by doing what is formally beautiful. Conversely, external beauty is a support for beauty of the soul. A beautiful environment gives people a sense of harmony, balance, equilibrium, and joy that can act as the model for the soul's own qualities.

Practical Sufism

We have already dealt in some detail with the theoretical dimensions of Sufi teachings, and we explained how the Sufi perspective differs from that of Kalam and philosophy. Here, we want to look at Sufism as one manifestation of *ihsan*, of doing what is beautiful or, more accurately, of *being* what is beautiful.

Practical Sufism—like jurisprudence, Kalam, philosophy, and theoretical Sufism—is an extremely widespread and complex phenomenon. Uncounted books have been written by the Sufis themselves, and recently by Western scholars, investigating the various manifestations of Islamic society and civilization that fit under the umbrella of Sufism. We cannot begin to deal with the complex issues that appear as soon as we look at Sufism in its historical forms. Instead, we simply want to suggest that Sufism is a convenient name for many of the manifestations of Islam's third dimension. It is convenient mainly because it is an indigenous term that is typically used in the way we are using it—though of course, other understandings have also been proposed. As an indigenous term, it avoids the connotations of the English words that have been proposed as its equivalent; chief among these, as mentioned earlier, is *mysticism*, which we consider particularly inappropriate.

What then is practical Sufism? First, it is to put theoretical Sufism into practice through one's everyday activities. Theoretical Sufism offers a vision of *tawhid* based on unveiling, firmly grounded in the Koranic revelation, and, in many of its manifestations, respectful toward, though not enthusiastic about, rational investigation. This vision sees human beings as imperfect because of *tanzih*, and it understands human perfection to lie in the actualization of all the divine qualities associated with *tashbih*. To be fully human is to actualize the divine form. In order to achieve this, Sufis follow the Sunna of the Prophet and seek to embody the Koran. They want the Koran to be their character, just as it was the Prophet's character.

Practical Sufism is fundamentally concerned with human character traits. One of the standard definitions holds that Sufism is the rectification of character; another tells us that all of Sufism is *adab* (a word we will discuss in detail). In the spirit of these definitions, Ibn al-'Arabi tells us that Sufism is to assume God's character traits as one's own (*al-takhalluq bi akhlaq allah*). Consideration of the implications of these few statements can provide us with a basic insight into the goal of Sufi practice.

Before explaining the implications of the term *rectification of character*, we should point out that this same term designates one of the major practical goals of the philosophers. The whole field of ethics as a subdiscipline of philosophy investigates the nature of character traits and how they can be rectified, and without doubt Muslim philosophers

did not consider this simply a theoretical issue. They felt that philosophy was a tool to be used for the eminently practical aim of becoming a better person. What differentiates the philosophers from the Sufis is the stress that the latter place upon the Prophet as the embodiment of perfect character and on his Sunna as the framework within which beautiful character traits can be actualized. The early philosophers, in keeping with the philosophical perspective in general, did not emphasize the necessity of following prophetic guidance. Often they referred only to the Greek philosophers, Aristotle in particular, in discussing ethics. Whether or not, in their personal lives, they considered Islam a necessary component for achieving a good character is not always clear; for the Sufis, Islam was the *sine qua non*.

The word that the philosophers use for "ethics" is *akhlaq*, which is the plural of *khuluq*, or "character," as in "rectification of character." The word *khuluq* means not only character in general, but also character trait; so the study of ethics is the study of character traits. It is extremely significant that in Arabic the word *khalq* (creation) is written the same way as *khuluq* (character). A person's character has to do with the way a person is created. A hadith that is often cited in support of the measuring out tells us that "God has finished with creation [*khalq*] and character [*khuluq*]." Nevertheless, people are not finished with character until they die. In effect, people participate through their own free choices in the creation of their character through the way they live their lives. That is why, as we saw, the Prophet used to pray, "O God, Thou hast made my creation beautiful, so make my character beautiful too." Without the possibility of the rectification of character, the whole idea of a voluntary return to God loses its meaning.

The expression "rectification of character" indicates that in the case of any given human being, character and its various traits are not yet finalized: People can change themselves, they can become better people. This discussion, however, focuses not on their activity, but rather on the qualities that make up their character; what we would today more likely call "personality." We ask, "What kind of person is he?" and we expect to be told about the person's character traits. But nowadays, we are more likely to use extremely general expressions such as "nice" or "nasty," "normal" or "strange," "regular" or "obnoxious." In the Islamic context, there are a large number of attributes that the Koran applies to the faithful and god-wary, and these are all desirable. Many more are applied to the truth-concealers, and these should be avoided. For their part, the philosophers are likely to use terms derived from Greek texts, though many of them overlap with Koranic terms.

The basic meaning of the word we have translated as *rectification* is "to prune, trim, cleanse, polish." We begin with a personality that needs work. All the nasty and obnoxious characteristics have to be trimmed away, and the good characteristics have to be cleaned and polished. Strictly speaking, there are no good character traits to be acquired,

since every good quality is already found in the human *fitra*, made in the form of God.

We cited the famous maxim from an early Sufi authority that Sufism is all *adab*. *Adab* is an extremely rich concept that can be employed to bring out the whole ethos of Islam. The primary meaning of the root is "to invite, to gather together for a banquet." The secondary meanings of the term suggest how important entertaining guests was in pre-Islamic times and within Islamic civilization itself. "Children of the road"—that is, travelers—are specified by the Koran as one of the categories of people to whom *zakat* should be given. Throughout Islamic history, it was considered a religious and social duty to invite travelers into the home and to take care of them.

Caring for travelers and strangers is only one small facet of *adab*, as the concept eventually developed. Early in Islamic history, the word had come to signify proper discipline of the soul and correct modes of activity. Primarily, this meant proper training and education in all the domains of Islamic learning and practice that were necessary for a person to achieve the ideals of the religion. Hence, *adab* was identified with the Prophet's Sunna in the broad sense, as including both his character and his activity.

However, *adab* was certainly not limited, for example, to the ideas discussed by the jurists or the specialists in Kalam; that is, to those of the ulama who delineated the rules for following the Shariah and defended the Koran and the Hadith. Rather, it was adopted as an ideal by all the learned and, to a large extent, by everyone who underwent an Islamic education.

In Islamic languages, to say that a person has *adab* means that he or she is cultured, well-mannered, sophisticated, and, in general, has good breeding. The word *adab* is also applied to belles lettres, especially poetry. Not uncommonly, a person with *adab* knows thousands of verses of the best poetry by heart and is able to recite them on the most appropriate occasions. It is almost impossible to imagine that a person should be described as having *adab* in classical times and not have beautiful handwriting. In several Islamic languages, one of the worst things that you can say about a person is that the person is without *adab*. One might as well say that the person is a monkey or a pig.

The term *adab* was applied to the proper mode of conduct for every group of people in society and to all the appropriate activities considered individually. Many books detail the *adab* of judges, Sufi novices, princes, courtiers, physicians, musicians, and even housewives. Barbara Metcalf writes the following about South Asian Islam, but what she says is true about Islam wherever it has become established:

Expressed in sūfī writings, implied in the practices of scholars and saints, embedded in the widely varied literatures of the adab of kings and courtiers, the adab of judges and muftis, the litera-

*ture of everyday pleasurable instruction, and manuals of religious and moral advice for ordinary people, the concept of adab proves to be a key to central religious concepts of South Asian Islam.*⁷

Metcalf suggests that one can define three conceptually distinct domains of Islamic teaching—the Shariah, the Sufi path (Tariqah), and *adab*, each of which has its own specialists. She sees each of these three domains as expressing the same realities of Islam: "Yet since all emerge, at core, as attempts to codify and embody the practice of the Prophet, they are ultimately the same in mainstream Islam." But she also recognizes that "*Adab* itself is based on the teachings of the other two domains,"⁸ and it is this point that we would stress. Rather than picture *adab* as a separate domain, we prefer to see it as one of the areas where the ideals of Islam's third dimension are integrated with those of the other two.

Adab is a codification of right activity that, depending on the context and the focus, may be concerned strictly with the Shariah, or with philosophic ethics, or with the moral implications of the Sufi stress upon the inward domain of doing what is beautiful. Unlike works on jurisprudence, which are limited to Islam's first dimension, works on *adab* combine attention to activity with attention to right attitudes and morality. Hence, they combine Islam's first and third dimensions. Moreover, they are usually grounded, explicitly or implicitly, in one or more of the intellectual perspectives of the second dimension.

Adab always brings along with it a sense of beauty, refinement, and subtlety. One could even say that *adab* represents in the domain of human character what rhythmic sound represents aurally and what calligraphy and architecture represent visually. The underlying motivation in all these domains is to embody the beautiful, to bring out the inner harmony, oneness, and balance demanded by *tawhid*. As Metcalf points out, the word *adab* is often employed to refer to outer behavior, but "it is understood as both cause of and then, reciprocally, fruit of one's inner self. Knowing, doing, and being are inescapably one."⁹ *Adab* represents, in other words, one of the forms in which Islam's three dimensions coalesce harmoniously to express the concrete human ideals of the religion.

If Sufis have said that Sufism is all *adab*, the point is that every activity needs to be correct—that is, based on the prophetic model—and that this can only come about when the soul is harmonized and integrated through sincerity, god-wariness, and doing what is beautiful. Moreover, doing what is beautiful cannot be forced or affected—that would destroy its spontaneity, which is one element of its beauty. Doing what is beautiful must well up in the soul—our poets might say—as fragrance wells up from the rose. Beautiful activity must be rooted

adab

in beautiful being. To repeat Metcalf's words, "Knowing, doing, and

being are inescapably one."

To embody the beautiful is to embody the qualities of God. This is Ibn al-'Arabi's point when he defines Sufism as "assuming the character traits of God as one's own." Ibn al-'Arabi explains that this is only a manner of speaking. In fact, those character traits are all latent within human beings because of the divine form, but they belong to God, and as long as people remain heedless of their own nature, the divine qualities within them will not become manifest in proper harmony and balance.

It is important to keep in mind that Muslims never understood sincerity and *ihسان* simply as attitudes, feelings, or psychological states. Rather, they looked upon them as modes of being that bring the unreal creature into harmony with the Real itself, thus transforming the actual mode of existence of the creature. Only this ontological transformation can explain how human beings can attain nearness to God, who is the Real.

To go to paradise is not like moving from this room to the next room, as the imagery might suggest. Rather, it is a transmutation of human nature that allows for a new mode of existence. Muslim authors often use alchemical imagery to explain the change that takes place. In alchemy, you do not take a piece of lead from this room to the twentieth story, where it lives happily ever after. On the contrary, you transmute lead, molecule by molecule, so that nothing is left but pure gold. Then only can the lead, which is no longer lead but gold, become a worthy ornament for the King. The King has no concern for a piece of lead that insists on keeping its own dark nature. He throws it back into the molten depths of the earth where it belongs.

Through *ihسان*, God's servants worship him as if they see him. They gradually turn their gaze away from the unreality of themselves and focus it upon the Real. They remember God constantly, and as a result, they forget their own selves, their own caprices, their own ignorance and folly. Created in the form of God, they contain within themselves all God's attributes, but only latently or mutedly. By focusing upon the Real and forgetting the unreal, people in effect awaken the real dimension of themselves.

Rumi provides us with an image for what happens when the Real is awoken within the soul. The human being is a compound of spirit and body. You can say that God has stuck an angel's wing on a donkey's tail. When people focus on their own angelic and divine qualities, God gives them the power to fly into his own presence, but if they forget about their angelic nature and dwell on their asininity, they remain in the stable. In the same sort of context, Rumi often compares the human being to Jesus mounted on his donkey. Thus he says:

Have mercy on Jesus, not on the ass!

*Let not your animal nature rule your intelligence!*¹⁰

The Ethos of Love

We said earlier that the various manifestations of *ihسان* focus on the quality of love. This is especially true of poetry, where love is the dominant theme with an infinite variety of images.¹¹ It is also true of Sufism, where love is typically presented as the key to Islamic life and practice. In other words, for a large body of Muslims, love has always been Islam's life-blood. In their view, without the animating spirit of love—Islam's third dimension—the religion dries up and desiccates, and we are left with sterile debates over the fine details of activity, or polemical attacks on anyone who does not toe the dogmatic line concerning issues of faith.

Muslims who focus on Islam's third dimension recognize that the Shari'ah is necessary for faith to develop, and that faith along with practice then provides the ground in which the flower of *ihسان* can blossom and flourish. Neither faith nor practice can ever be abandoned, because they are *ihسان*'s framework and support, but faith and practice are not their own raison d'être. They exist in order to give fruit, and that fruit, in one word, is love. In order to understand the perspective of Muslims who think this way, we need to discuss their understanding of love in some detail.

As Rumi, the greatest poet of love, tells us, love is both indefinable and infinitely explainable. One can neither say what it is, nor can one be done with speaking about it. Nevertheless, we can follow Rumi, and many of the other Sufi authors, and suggest some of what love implies. We have already explained that love is a divine attribute or, in other words, that God is love. Love needs to be distinguished from mercy, God's general mercy is directed toward all things, while his specific mercy becomes manifest in paradise, which is given to the god-wary. The opposite of God's specific mercy is wrath, which finds its clearest reflection in hell.

The Koran associates God's love with his specific mercy, not with his general mercy. God loves those who do what is beautiful, but he does not love those who conceal the truth and do what is ugly. If he did love them, he would not place them in hell. None of this is to deny that God's mercy takes precedence over his wrath, and that hell itself is a mercy for those who enter it, but this is another issue that would lead us too far from the question of love.

The Sufi stress on love for God grows out of their emphasis on the priority of *tashbih* over *tanzih*, of mercy over wrath. When the theologians and jurists discuss God, with their rational categories and their commands and prohibitions, the result can only be a human feeling of distance and fear. But Sufis place their emphasis on God's nearness and his love for human beings. Instead of stressing rational arguments and abstract discourse, they employ every sort of analogy and image to

make the experience of God concrete. Their underlying message is that God loves us and desires the best for us. To bring this home, they stress God's beautiful and lovable qualities in the language of everyday speech. It is only human to love someone who loves you. Anyone who has that much sense has to be lovable. The Sufis were supremely aware of this psychological tendency. Moreover, they were fully informed of the metaphysical fact that God's goal in creating human beings was to actualize love, given that no other creature can truly love God.

Innumerable Sufi texts could be quoted to support these points. Given the limitations of space, we will only suggest that the most accessible English language texts on the role of love in Islam are the various translations of Rumi's works.

Instead of quoting what is already available in English, we present below a short text that has not previously been translated. It is from one of the greatest classics of Sufi literature—a work, however, that has largely been ignored by modern scholars—known as *Kashf al-asrar* (The Unveiling of the Mysteries) by Rashid al-Din Maybudi. This is a Koran commentary which, the author tells us, he began writing in the year 520/1126. Since it fills eight thousand pages in its modern edition, one can suppose that it took a few years to complete. Only about one-quarter of *Kashf al-asrar* is devoted to Sufi interpretations of Koranic verses, since the main body of the text is concerned with translating the Koran into Persian, explaining its apparent meaning, and then explicating its literal and historical context and significance. Then the author turns to the more hidden meaning of the text. He often quotes in these sections from his teacher, the famous Sufi and jurist, Khwaja 'Abdallah Ansari (d. 481/1088). Ansari is noted for important works in both Arabic and Persian. His Persian prose is among the most beautiful and poetic of the language, and hence it is especially difficult to translate. In the sections from Ansari quoted below, we try to bring out the rhythm of the text by translating it as if it were poetry.

The author is explaining the meaning of the most commonly cited Koranic verse about love, already quoted above: "O you who have faith, should any of you turn back on your religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him . . ." (5:54). Here then is Maybudi's text:

"O you who have faith, should any of you turn back on your religion." This verse contains an allusion for the knowers and good news for the faithful.

The allusion is that God is the protector of the community of Islam, the primordial religion, the Muhammadan Shariah, and that it will always remain. Nothing will be lost if some people turn their back on this religion and become apostates. The Lord of Mightiness will bring others who embrace this religion with soul and heart and nurture it lovingly. God will preserve the signposts

of His commandments and the pillars of His prohibitions through them. He will decorate the carpet of the Shariah by their dignity. He has inscribed them with the letters of love, for He says, "whom He loves and who love Him." He has written upon the page of their hearts with a divine script: "He has written faith in their hearts" [58:23]. He has illuminated their inmost eye with the lamp of true knowledge, "So he is upon a light from his Lord" [39:22]. The Divinity is their upbringer, the lap of prophecy is their cradle, eternity without beginning and eternity without end are their warder, the playing field of gentleness is the lodging place of their gaze, and the carpet of awe is the resting place of their aspiration.

God makes the same point when He says in another place, "So if those cover its truth, we have already entrusted it to a people who do not cover its truth" [6:89]. The Prophet said, "A group among my people will never cease to support the Truth. None who oppose them will harm them until God's command comes."

The good news is that whoever does not turn his back is counted among the objects of love. They are the people of love and faith. Those who do not fall into the abyss of apostasy have the good news that the name of love will fall on them. God says, "Should any of you turn back on your religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him." First He affirms His love, then the love of the servants. Thus you come to understand that as long as God does not love the servant, the servant will not love . . .

*Khwaja 'Abdallah said,
The sign of finding love's well is contentment,
that which increases love's water is faithfulness.
The substance of love's treasure is light,
the fruit of love's tree is joy.
If you fail to separate yourself from the two worlds
you are excused from love,
If you seek recompense from the Friend,
you are ungrateful.
Love is love for God,
the rest is all idle fancy.
"Whom He loves and who love Him" is a great work,
a marvelous bazaar—it lifted up water and clay.
Thereby God became love's kiblāh
and the target of union's arrows.
How could the traveler not be delighted
that love is the nearest house to the Lord?
Love is a tree that produces only joy's fruit,
an earth that grows nothing but intimacy's flowers,
a cloud that rains nothing but light,
a wine whose potion is nothing but honey,*

*a road whose earth is nothing but musk and ambergris.
 Love was written in eternity without beginning,
 love's brand lasts till eternity without end.
 From the time when love
 for the Friend
 became my habit
 and character
 all of me comes
 from the Friend,
 and the Friend comes
 from my all.
 Behold how long love's fortune lasts!
 Hear how beautiful is the tale of lovers!
 Love's playing field is as wide as the heart,
 paradise is one branch of the tree of love.
 Those who drink love's wine are promised the vision,
 whoever is sincere will reach the goal.¹²*

The Embodiment of the Spirit

We have come a long way since discussing the Five Pillars, but enough references have been made to the Shariah for the reader to understand that practice is the foundation and the most necessary element of Islam. Human beings are embodied spirits. Body and spirit meet in soul, which is both body and spirit. Who we are, in other words, is inextricably connected with our embodiment, and our embodiment is inextricably connected with what we do.

A certain type of religious orientation, commonly found incorporated even within post-Christian sensibilities, would place the body and spirit at loggerheads. It has not been uncommon for Christians to set up a duality, according to which the spiritual is good, the bodily is evil, and the latter has to be overcome or avoided. In today's post-Christian environment, it is also common to meet the opposite extreme, where everything has to be judged by the body, and the idea that there could be a spiritual reality somehow unaffected by the body is utterly rejected.

The traditional Islamic view, as discussed earlier, accepts both spirit and body as significant components of the human being. The spirit is more real, because it pertains to the divine side of things; it is God's own breath. However, human beings cannot possibly exist as human beings without bodies, and hence, in a very important sense, the spirit depends upon the body. The myth is clear on this point: God first shaped Adam's clay with his own two hands; only then did he blow the spirit into the clay and create the human being.

The drama of human existence is played out on the level of the soul, which combines the inherent luminosity of the spirit with the darkness

of the body. Our own individualities are inseparable from both spirit and body, and this is precisely the meaning of *soul* as we have been employing the term. The soul, as the Muslim psychologists often express it, is the child of a spiritual father and a corporeal mother. The perfection of the soul lies in allowing the paternal heritage to dominate over the maternal heritage; or, in other terms, to let the heavenly rule over the earthly, the luminous over the dark.

The earth yields its fruits only when it receives light and water from heaven. The woman gives birth only when she is impregnated by the man. Colors appear only when light shines in darkness. If the earth rejects light and water, it withers and dies. If the woman rejects the man, she remains barren. If darkness refuses the light, it has nothing to show.¹³

Such imagery is employed by the Muslim authors to explain that the soul has to submit itself to the influence of the spirit, just as human beings have to submit themselves to God. To turn away from the spirit and focus exclusive attention on the body is to reject the light and pursue the darkness. The soul's luminosity pertains to the divine attributes, while its darkness derives from the bodily receptacle that is absolutely necessary so that the light may have a place in which to shine. The soul is embodied light, or spiritualized darkness.

The soul is not static: It changes instant by instant with the flux of God's creativity. At every moment, the soul is faced with new situations, and the spirit's freedom from all constraint gives the soul a relative freedom of choice. Every act, and in particular every voluntary act, has an effect on how the divine form unfolds within the human being.

One of the most common ways in which the development of the soul is discussed is in terms of three ascending levels, called "the soul that commands to evil," "the blaming soul," and "the soul at peace."

At the first level, souls find little of the spirit's light within themselves: They tend toward forgetfulness and heedlessness; caprice rules; people do what they feel like doing, simply because they feel like it. For infants, this is the natural, normal, and good situation. Nevertheless, everyone knows that the child must gradually be trained to accept that there are authorities higher than its own wishes, but as long as the child has not yet developed a healthy rational faculty, there is little use employing the arguments of reason.

The Koran, however, is not addressed to children. It is addressed to adults in full possession of their rational faculties. It tells them that following caprice is irrational, because rational beings know that there are authorities higher than their own feelings. Of course, the Koran does not propose a program of logical reasoning and philosophical discourse so that people can come to this understanding; that is fine for a modern philosophy department, but hardly a reasonable position for God to take when he is speaking to every adult human being, not just those who enjoy philosophizing. The purpose of the revelation is to

guide people to a mode of happiness that would be unimaginable without divine aid. "No soul knows what comfort is laid up for them secretly, as a recompense for what they were doing" (32:17).

The Koran, in short, addresses human beings and tells them that it is utterly absurd for them to follow the dictates of caprice as if they were children. Not only is it absurd, it is dangerous, since it may eventually lead to the dissolution of the divine form in which they were created. However, the Koran recognizes that many, if not most, people dwell at this level. Their souls are overcome by the darkness and heedlessness that pertain to the bodily dimension of reality. The Muslim psychologists employ the Koranic term "the soul that commands to evil" (12:53) to refer to this lowest stage of human becoming, the stage where truth-concealing and heedlessness come naturally. At this stage, the person rejects everything that goes against caprice with no thought of the consequences. To mix Rumi's metaphor of the angel's wing and the donkey's tail, this is the stage where the tail wags the wing.

There is no reason to suppose that human beings will necessarily pass beyond this stage. The Koran frequently addresses the Prophet, telling him not to waste his breath trying to reason with the truth-concealers. If someone is blind, no one can make him see but God:

Those who cry lies to Our signs are deaf and dumb, dwelling in the darknesses. Whomsoever God will, He misguides, and whomsoever He will, He puts on a straight path. (6:39)

Significantly, the Koran frequently compares those who are deaf and blind with animals. The stage of the soul that commands to evil is precisely the animal level of the soul, unilluminated by the light of intelligence. As the tradition tells us, those who remain at the animal level will experience themselves as animals in the *barzakh* and at the resurrection. The vast distance separating their human potential from their animal actuality sets up a profound disequilibrium in the soul that can only be experienced as blazing torment:

The truth-concealers take their enjoyment and eat as the cattle eat, and the Fire shall be their lodging. (47:12)

Be not as those who say, "We hear," and they hear not. The worst of beasts in God's sight are those who are deaf and dumb and have no intelligence. (8:21-22)

Hast thou seen him who takes his caprice to be his god? Wilt thou be a guardian over him? Or deemest thou that most of them hear or understand? They are but as the cattle. No, they are more misguided from the path. (25:43-44)

We have created for Gehenna many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts, but they think not intelligently with them; they have eyes, but see not with them; they have ears, but hear not with them. They are like the cattle—no, they are more misguided. Those—they are the heedless. (7:179)

As children grow up, standards of judgment and activity are gradually instilled into them by their family and surroundings. Typically, these standards have a moral dimension—things are presented as good or bad, right or wrong. Western civilization has tried—without much success—to give those standards a rational and scientific basis. Islam holds that true standards are innate, because they stem from the divine form within us. This is one of the senses of the already quoted hadith, "Every child is born according to *fitra*. Then its parents make it into a Jew, a Christian, a Zoroastrian"—or, as we would add today, an agnostic, a scientific humanist, a New Ager, and so on.

Whatever may be the source of our values, we have them. The Koran addresses only those with a sense of values (having given up on the animals among them). It reminds them of their *fitra*, their innate recognition of *tawhid*. Those who respond to the reminder remember God. They have faith in him and his messenger, and they submit to his commandments by following the Shariah. But this does not mean that the soul is at once irradiated with the light of the spirit or catapulted into the divine presence. Quite the contrary, it simply means that people have now become aware that, within this embodied spirit that is the soul, the luminous and intelligent dimension is more fundamental and more real. The outward reflection of the spirit known as revelation has been acknowledged, but its inner reality has yet to be fully realized.

This is the second stage of the soul. Muslim psychologists call it "the blaming soul" (a term derived from Koran 75:2). The conscience is awake, but this is a conscience informed by the prophetic message. People at this stage of development observe the Shariite rulings as best they can. More than that, they are attempting to be sincere in their activity and to do what is beautiful in every situation. Naturally, they often fail to live up to the Koranic ideal or the Prophet's Sunna, but they do not shrug their shoulders as if nothing was wrong. Instead, they blame themselves for not struggling harder in God's path. They have a sense of shame before God, because they are worshiping him "as if they see Him." This explains one of the senses of the Prophet's saying, "Every religion has its character trait, and the character trait of Islam is shame [*haya*]."

Most of the faithful never pass beyond the stage of the blaming soul. This is not to say that they are all equal, simply that they never reach the perfection that is embodied in the Prophet and the great exemplars of the tradition. Each of the faithful will reach a different stage of development. No two souls are the same, and any given soul never

ceases undergoing transformations. To dwell at the stage of blaming oneself is to dwell in hope and trust. It is to turn oneself over to God, since only the awareness of God in the first place allows one to blame oneself. Rumi makes this point in answer to one of his disciples who was upset at the way in which people had to kowtow to the Mongol rulers of the time, who were not even Muslims:

"In former times [said the disciple], the truth-concealers worshipped idols and prostrated themselves before them. Today we do the same thing. We go before the Mongols and prostrate ourselves and show all kinds of respect to them. Then we consider ourselves Muslims! And we have many other idols within ourselves, such as greed, caprice, spite, and envy. We obey all of them. Hence, outwardly and inwardly we act the same as the idol-worshippers, but we consider ourselves Muslims!"

The master answered: "But there is one more thing. It enters your mind that 'This is bad and cannot be approved of.' Hence the eye of your heart has certainly seen some ineffable, indefinable, and tremendous thing that shows these to you as ugly and shameful. Salt water appears salty to someone who has drunk fresh water. 'Things become clear through their opposites.' Hence God has placed the light of faith in your soul, and it sees these things as ugly. After all, they appear ugly in comparison to that light's beauty. If not, why don't others have this pain? They are happy in what they are doing and say, 'This is the thing.' God will give you what you seek for. Wherever your aspiration lies, that you will become. 'The bird flies with its wings, and the person of faith flies with his aspiration.'"¹⁴

Those who have faith should have a constant awareness of their own faults and blame themselves for not overcoming them. The flip side of this coin is that they have to hold before themselves an ideal to which they aspire. They will never reach it until they try; and when they do try, they will not reach it through their own effort, but, as Rumi and many others who stress God's gentleness and mercy tell us, God will give it to them, in his own good time.

The final stage of the soul is called "the soul at peace," on the basis of this Koranic verse: "O soul at peace, return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing! Enter among My servants! Enter My paradise!" (89:27) This is the soul that has returned to God in this world. Such a soul belongs to those who have established *ih-san* to such a degree that they worship God not "as if" they see him, but while actually seeing him present in all things, including themselves. This, in the Sufi view, is the station of Muhammad, who is the first among God's servants, and the other prophets, as well as anyone else whom God chooses. It is the ideal toward which Muslims should be striving.

The Koran addresses itself neither to the soul that commands to evil, which is deaf and blind, nor to the soul at peace, which has reached the goal and has rejoined the spirit's light. Rather, it is addressed to the blaming soul, which wavers between spirit and body, light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong. The Koran tells people where they stand—in an ambiguous domain halfway between God and nothingness—and shows them the way to choose the Real over the unreal. To the extent that their freedom is real, they will be able to choose where they will go. They choose whether the angel's wing will lift them to the highest heaven, or the donkey's tail will drag them to the lowest earth.

All of Islamic thinking about God and the human being draws this picture of an ambiguous reality hanging between pure light and utter darkness, but this ambiguous reality can never escape embodiment. The "bodily resurrection" is not only a dogma in Islam, it is also the only possible way to explain how people can be divine and human at the same time. God alone has no embodiment as this or that; human beings are embodied forever.

In no sense does bodily resurrection mean that this physical body will last forever. The body, which everyone knows is ephemeral, is merely the vehicle for the embodied spirit, the soul. The soul—the spirit manifest in forms—lasts forever, not the material body. The soul itself is a body, just as it is a spirit. Sometimes it does not recognize itself as a body, imagining that it is only spirit, but the dreamworld dissolves this illusion, as does the *barzakh*, the resurrection, paradise, and hell. In all these worlds, the soul experiences its embodiment without a bodily garment of the type that it wears in this world.

To return to what we said earlier, Islamic theoretical teachings support and deepen the practical teachings, but given the fact of the soul's embodied reality, the practical teachings take on a fundamental importance. It is not accidental that Islam presents itself most clearly and obviously in the Shariah. The Five Pillars are called pillars because the religion has nothing to stand upon without them: Only through the practices set down in the pillars and in the Shariah in general is it possible to embody the Koran in the actual experience of life.